



URBAN RENEWAL OF CHINATOWN HONOLULU  
AND  
THE PEOPLE AGAINST CHINATOWN EVICTION

Plan 600

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## Background

Chinatown Honolulu developed historically as a community of poor, working, and immigrant people. Landless Hawaiians were the first to settle in downtown Honolulu at the center of commerce, industry and business from Kakaako to Iwilei. As immigrant Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos finished their labor contracts on the plantations, they also moved to downtown Honolulu.

Chinatown was first settled by the Chinese. They were the first ethnic group to be imported as laborers. Later, as other immigrant groups also came, worked, and left the plantation, they settled in the Chinatown area. The community extended from School Street on the North, to the Waterfront on the South, and from Liliha Street on the West, to Fort Street on the East. The community included single family dwellings, tenement houses, sundry stores, general stores, warehouses, markets, bakeries, tailor shops, laundry places, and entertainment spots that developed into the "red light" district of Honolulu. A part of Chinatown that gained renown through the reports of a mainland reporter was known as "Hell's Half Acre." It was a crowded tenement block. The theaters, bars, dancehalls and hotels along Hotel Street also gained worldwide renown for its brothels and nightlife by sailors, merchant marines, tourists, and military personnel.

Hit by Urban Renewal, Highway Development and the expansion of the commercial and business district, Chinatown now includes 14 blocks covering 36.5 acres bounded by Beretania Street on the North, the Waterfront on the South, River Street on the West, and Nuuanu Avenue on the East.

Buildings are wooden, concrete and wood, or solid concrete. Most of the buildings are sub-standard in facilities and dilapidated in condition. The business corridor along King Street would be the exception.

Land in Chinatown is owned by The City and big and small landlords. Big landlords include Bishop Estate, Campbell Estate, Magoon Brothers, Mrs. Marks and the McCandless Heirs, C. Q. Yee Hop, the Hiram Fong Hui and the Chinese Societies. Of the small owners, many are Chinese families who inherited the land from their ancestors who first settled the area.

The ethnic background of the people is mixed: 56% of the people in Chinatown are Filipino, 13% are Chinese, 10% are Hawaiian, with the remaining 21% being Japanese, mixed, and "other" (Portuguese, Okinawan, Puerto Rican).

Seventy-five per cent of the households are singles, while only 25% are families. The approximate population is 1,400. About 11% of the people have lived in Chinatown for over ten years. Only 1/3 of the people have only lived there for less than two years.

Approximately 45% of the family households and 85% of the single households earn or gross less than \$6,000 a year. The median income for families is \$560 per month and for singles, \$229 per month. Rents are between \$30 and \$70. The most that the people living there can afford is \$40 - \$60 for single individuals and \$100 for a family of four.

The majority of Chinatown people are senior citizens. They live on fixed incomes from pensions and social security benefits. Nine per cent of the community receive general assistance from the Department of Social Services and Housing. Of the remaining people who work, 95% hold blue-collar jobs, 4% are white-collar workers, and only 1% are professionals.

#### WHY PEOPLE LIVE IN CHINATOWN?

Poor, working and immigrant people seek out Chinatown because it is a community where they can afford to live and maintain a reasonable standard of living. The primary factor is the cheap rent.

Rents are cheap because the landlords have not made repairs. The buildings are falling apart. Many of the buildings still have communal kitchens, showers, and toilets. Landlords have collected and hoarded the rent money rather than putting back some of that rent into building repairs and improvements. In some cases, landlords of these "slum" buildings have often divided one room into two in order to double the rent on the same floor space. If they could charge higher rents and attract tenants, they would probably raise rents even higher.

Despite the run-down conditions of the homes and lack of modern facilities, many people seek out Chinatown as a home. For one, it is located near the center of town. All of the major bus routes converge in downtown, making transportation easy and cheap for those who cannot afford to buy cars and pay for gas.

For the single and elderly who make up the majority of the people, they find it convenient for medical care, social services, and their social life. Most elderly men need to be close to medical services. If they lived in the country they would be too far away because most of them do not drive or own cars. Restaurants in the Chinatown area cook family style local food at reasonable prices. There are various ethnic restaurants in the vicinity (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese). For recreation, there are nearby pool halls, dance halls, and Aala Park. An elderly man who is single can live an active and interesting life in Chinatown. There are many men their age with whom they share common interests and they develop close friendships. Life in the country areas, where houses are farther apart and most of the people live as families, would be more lonely and less active.

Despite the lack of open spaces, both families and single men have been able to raise chickens and cultivate small gardens in the Chinatown buildings and yard space around the buildings. In addition to pet roosters, they keep pet cats and dogs.

In summary, the Chinatown community enjoys a lifestyle particular to their means of living. The cultural and social life in Chinatown is rich and the people want to continue living near those cultural and social services.



# URBAN RENEWAL THREATENS TO DESTROY CHINATOWN AND THE WAY OF LIFE FOR THE CHINATOWN COMMUNITY.

The Chinatown community as a whole is being threatened with eviction for Urban Renewal. Everyone, including residents and business people, will be evicted to make way for redevelopment. Although everyone will be affected, eventually, not everyone fully understands the impact that Urban Renewal will have on their lives.

Since 1950 The City began to drive people out of the "slums," tear down the buildings, and turn the land over to developers. Areas first hit were Queen Emma, Kukui, Kauluwela and Aala. Five hundred fourteen families, 369 individuals and 98 businesses were evicted from the Queen Emma area; 904 families, 867 individuals and 407 businesses were evicted from the Kukui Project. The figures for the other areas are not available. The City refuses to allow access to these public records. (At this time, PACE is in the process of filing a suit to make these figures known publicly.)

When The City first announced its Urban Renewal plans, they promised to build better homes for the people living there. The City promised to relocate the people dislocated by the Urban Renewal. The City Charter requires that for every person of low income that is displaced for Urban Renewal, one low income unit must be built for relocation. What actually happened was quite different. At Queen Emma the units built by Clarence Ching (the man who filled Salt Lake) were too expensive for those people who were dislocated for the Project. Even though these people had first choice, they could not afford to move into the Queen Emma Project. Studios cost from \$194 to \$225 a month; one bedroom units from \$235 to \$275 a month; two bedroom units from \$244 to \$320 a month. In order to rent at Queen Emma, you must make a minimum of \$1,020 a month and present a list of credit references. The income is based on that of one family member, not a joint income. Although this may be average for the Honolulu Housing Market, it is above the means of most of the people who got displaced. As for the businesses in the area, there was no shopping area reopened. However, a few years later, Longs Drugs and Safeway opened up on Pali Hwy. across the street from the Queen Emma Project.

At Kukui, the redevelopment project did not start until 15 years after people were evicted and the buildings demolished. People who were dislocated were not able to move back to the Kukui area for more than 15 years. By then, the children were fully grown and in some cases, "old folks" had passed on. When the Kukui Gardens were finally constructed, the homes were for moderate income, low-income and senior citizens. Applicants came from all over Hawaii. In the Kukui Project, the evictees did not receive first priority and were left to compete with the thousands of low and moderate income people from all over Hawaii. There were not enough units built that would even accommodate the total number of persons evicted.

For businesses, the Cultural Plaza and Kukui Marketplace were built. Prices at the Cultural Plaza range from 70¢ to \$1.00 per square foot. For a place 25 feet by 20 feet, the rent would be \$500 per month, or 6% - 10% of the gross sales per month, whichever is greater. In addition, the shopkeepers pay for all improvements and utilities and at least \$200 per month for promotions. For the small business

--The State also has a housing office and funds which could be allocated to develop housing in the Chinatown area.

4. The Downtown Improvement Association is the money behind Urban Renewal. Among the members of the Downtown Improvement Association are:

AMFAC -- which is phasing out sugar operations in Ewa and Kauai for development; behind development at Pearlridge; operates Island Holiday Hotels and Hawaiian Discovery Tours; has department store chains including I. Magnin and Liberty House.

C. BREWER & CO., LTD. -- developments at Ka'u (Big Island); hotels at Hilo, Volcano and Ka'u; owns Matson Navigation Co.

ALEXANDER and BALDWIN, INC. -- developers of Wailea on Maui; Kahalui Shopping Center.

CASTLE & COOKE, INC. -- phasing out agricultural land to build Mililani Town; phased out Maunaloa Pine production on Molokai; developing pine operations in the Philippines.

BISHOP ESTATE -- evicted farmers from Waialae Kahala, Hawaii Kai and Kalama Valley and Kaneohe for high cost home developments; make lands available for developers in Ewa and Pearl City; threatens Heeia and Heeia-Kea residents with eviction.

BISHOP TRUST CO., LTD. -- represents landlords who want to evict residents at Niumalu-Nawiliwili.

MARKS -- together with Windward Partners (Joe Pao), wants to evict people at Waiahole-Waikane.

HAWAIIAN ELECTRIC COMPANY -- evicting residents at Heeia-Kea.

TEN BANK AND LOAN COMPANIES -- First Hawaiian Bank, Liberty Bank, Bank of Hawaii, Central Pacific Bank, City Bank, Finance Factors, Honolulu Mortgage, Pioneer Federal, Hawaiian Federal Savings, and International Savings and Loan.

These are the most notable of the members of the Downtown Improvement Association who back up Chinatown Urban Renewal. It is interesting to note that all of the Big Five corporations sit on the DIA. These are the same companies that most of the Chinatown residents worked for on the plantations. Now, it is these companies that are evicting these same workers from their homes.

5. Private landlords also stand to benefit from the Urban Renewal. Some landlords did not want to sell out to The City but were forced to. Other landlords are joining in fully with the development hoping to get more profits by redevelopment than from renting "slums."
6. Individual development corporations and construction companies make large profits from Urban Renewal projects. Clarence Ching developed Queen Emma, Kukui Gardens, and the Cultural Plaza. Hal Hansen of Oceanside Properties developed the Kukui Plaza. Hawaii Corporation and Ginza Ltd. are developing Beretania-North. Future project developments are decided by the City Council and the Mayor.

THE CHINATOWN COMMUNITY ORGANIZES TO FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS TO DECENT HOUSING THEY CAN AFFORD AND DECENT LIVELIHOODS INSIDE CHINATOWN.

In July, 1975, the Chinatown Community formed their organization called People Against Chinatown Eviction (P.A.C.E.). They are united around three basic demands:

1. Stop all Chinatown evictions.
2. Build decent, permanent low-cost housing in Chinatown at rents Chinatown people can afford and in which they can maintain the lifestyle of their choice and repair what is here with no rent increases.
3. Decent livelihoods for small businesses and workers in Chinatown. Storefronts at rents that small Chinatown businesses can afford. Repair existing buildings with no rent increases.

The main actions by The City during this one year period were:

1. Condemnation of 45 N. Pauahi Street for not meeting building code standards and ordering the eviction of the tenants.
2. Condemnation of Aloha Hotel as a public nuisance and ordering the eviction of the residents and demolition of the building.
3. Condemnation of 1189 River Street, Beretania Dancehall, New Kukui Cafe and K. T. Pool Hall (hereafter referred to as 1189 et. al.) and ordering eviction of the small business people and residents.
4. Offering \$4,000 in cash to residents who move out of areas slated for Urban Renewal.
5. Refusing access to public records which would show how many people have already been evicted by Urban Renewal and provided with relocation housing.
6. Bought out all the landowners on Block A and the landowners of portions of Block B that were required for Urban Renewal.

The main actions of P.A.C.E. during this period were directed against these major actions by The City:

1. July, 1975 -- The P.A.C.E. organization formed. They held a rally and march followed by a community meeting.
2. September, 1975 -- P.A.C.E demonstrated at City Hall putting the Mayor on Notice that the community is organizing to fight against eviction and for decent low-cost housing and low-cost storefronts in Chinatown.
3. October 7, 1975 -- Picket of Honowaii Investment Co. in protest of the eviction suit filed by Thomas and Henry Lau, landlords of 45 N. Pauahi Street and owners of the Honowaii Investment Co.

4. October 14, 1975 -- Court hearing on the eviction suit filed by Thomas and Henry Lau against the residents of 45 N. Pauahi Street.
5. November 24, 1975 -- March/Rally/Overnight Sit-in at the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) at the City Municipal Bldg. Hundreds of Chinatown people and their supporters marched in the rain to demand that The City "Stop the November 30 Eviction" of small business people and residents at 1189 et. al. The overnight sit-in was a sign of their determination to fight eviction all the way until The City meets their demands.
6. December 1-10, 1975 -- Picket of the DHCD Chinatown Site Office in protest of the harassment by the DHCD workers and to build for recognition of the P.A.C.E. organization.
7. December 16-17, 1975 -- Picket of Honowaii Investment Co. in protest of the Laus' motion for "summary judgment" in their eviction suit against the residents of 45 N. Pauahi Street.
8. December 17, 1975 -- Mass picket in front of the Courthouse when the motion for "summary judgment" was heard in court. Motion was granted.
9. December 18, 1975 -- First court hearing of The City's eviction suit against 1189 et. al.
10. January 6, 1976 -- 1189 et. al. have an administrative hearing to air their grievances on inadequate relocation offers by DHCD. Grievances were denied
11. January 7, 1976 -- Residents of Aloha Hotel go to court on The City's complaint against the Aloha Hotel for being a public nuisance because of its run-down condition. Residents ordered to seek relocation.
12. Aloha residents apply to DHCD for relocation referrals.
13. March 25, 1976 -- Mass picket at Courthouse when the landlords of 45 N. Pauahi Street go to court to get a "writ of possession" which would give the landlords the right to call in the police to evict the residents. The chanting was so loud that Judge Kawakami had to move his hearing upstairs. "Writ" was granted.
14. March 25, 1976 til early May, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. held community meetings, press conferences, pickets and strategy sessions to prepare to stand up against eviction by the State Sheriff and City Police. Pickets were held at the Laus' Honowaii Investment Co. and at City Hall. Finally, in early May, the Laus made an offer to negotiate. However, because the terms of the negotiation were not agreeable, the case was appealed to Supreme Court and a bond of \$5,000 was posted by P.A.C.E. to hold off eviction by the Sheriff and Police until after the Supreme Court decision is rendered.
15. April 30, 1976 -- Final appeal was made to Mayor Fasi to sit down and negotiate with P.A.C.E.



16. May 3, 1976 -- Mayor Fasi was not in. Acting Mayor Sharpless denied the appeal for negotiation talks. P.A.C.E. marched to Kukui Plaza and demonstrated there during rush-hour traffic.
17. May 13, 1976 -- Hearing to set a court date for a jury trial for 1189 et. al.
18. May 30, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. invited the City Council to take a tour of Chinatown. Only Councilwoman Bornhorst accepted.
19. June 9, 1976 -- Hearing for "summary judgment" decided in favor of The City despite a major protest at the court. P.A.C.E. marched to City Hall to talk with Mayor Fasi after the hearing. He told them they can bring in ten lawyers and thousands of people, but he was still going to kick out all of the Chinatown people..
20. June 9, 1976 til mid-July, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. held press conferences, demonstrations at City Hall during Bicentennial concerts held by the Mayor. They leafleted the Lions Convention to expose the Mayor's stand on Chinatown. Finally The City agreed to let the question of eviction for 1189 et. al. be settled in Supreme Court and they negotiated for a \$4,250 bond to be deposited with the court to hold off the Sheriff and Police until a decision will be made by the Supreme Court.
21. July 17, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. celebrated its one-year anniversary on Pauahi Street. Over 500 supporters joined in the celebration.
22. With the threat of immediate eviction held off by appeals to Supreme Court and payment of bond money, the P.A.C.E. organization is concentrating on broadening their influence inside Chinatown and developing a more concrete plan for decent, low-cost housing and low-cost storefronts inside Chinatown. As the Mayor's campaign got into full swing in August, September, October, and November, the actions against the Chinatown people were temporarily held off.
23. September 30, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. took offensive against The City by filing suit against The City for refusing them access to public documents. P.A.C.E. wants to see records of how many people were evicted for Urban Renewal and how many people were provided relocation benefits and housing by The City as they are required to do under the City Charter.
24. November 21, 1976 -- P.A.C.E. celebrated 'One year victory' of holding off eviction of 1189 et. al.



## SUMMATION

The success of the P.A.C.E. organization has been and will continue to be based on the strength of its support from the Chinatown community and the broader community in Hawaii.

The legal "in court" actions have been a necessary part of the struggle against eviction, but the political actions--pickets, demonstrations, press conferences--have been decisive in putting public pressure on The City to do something about the living conditions of the people in Chinatown.

Through both legal and political actions, Urban Renewal has been held up in Chinatown. The eviction cases are tied up in Supreme Court until September, 1977.

In its brief history, the most militant and committee P.A.C.E. members have been those people who have been directly affected by the development--those people faced with immediate eviction notices.

The strongest support from outside the community have come from other communities who have fought or are fighting struggles against eviction and for decent low-cost housing--Waiahole-Waikane, Heeia, Heeia-Kea, Mokauea Fishermen's Association, Niumalu-Nawiliwili Tenants Association, Ota Camp, and Old Vineyard Street Residents Association. In many cases, members of the Downtown Improvement Association are evicting the people from these communities as well. Support has also come from University students and workers' organizations. Broader support is being cultivated through the public media, slideshow presentations, and Chinatown tours.

The P.A.C.E. organization is not opposed to the redevelopment of Chinatown. They are opposed to development of Chinatown that will not provide for their needs and that will make their living conditions worse. They are going to hold out in their homes and fight eviction until The City gives in to their demands for decent, low-cost housing and decent livelihoods for the small business people and workers in Chinatown. If they succeed in holding out in their homes, they can temporarily stop all Urban Renewal projects. At the point that The City and DIA are stopped, they will have to negotiate with P.A.C.E. to develop plans for meeting the needs of the Chinatown people. The residents are taking such a militant stand because they feel that they have no alternative. As one resident, Mr. Bautista, of 45 N. Pauahi Street said, "Well, you see, I have no place to go. So, I stay and fight. I no move until we get house. Even if the bulldozer comes, I stay and fight."

The struggle is just beginning for the Chinatown people. They have a long way to go in building their organization and in exposing The City and isolating them and the DIA in the "eyes" of the public. If the pressure built against The City and the DIA is strong enough, concessions of low-cost housing and storefronts inside Chinatown will be made a part of the Urban Renewal plans for Chinatown.

Internally, the P.A.C.E. leadership is committed to carry the struggle through to victory. They now have the experience of one year. Whereas they had been hesitant to stand up against "City Hall," they have gradually lost all respect for the Mayor and became cautious of the City Council. They are more determined to challenge his authority over Chinatown Urban Renewal.

Another important fact in delaying Urban Renewal in Chinatown is the designation of Chinatown as a Historic Preservation site. This has held up development of the Smith-Beretania Project because it does not conform to design requirements for a Historic District. Along with this, the City Council set a moratorium on demolition of buildings until Chinatown is surveyed and the buildings to be set aside for preservation are designated.

Also contributing to the P.A.C.E. position against the Mayor is the differences between the City Council and the Mayor. The Kukui Plaza investigation and the public hearings on the scandal have substantiated earlier claims made by the P.A.C.E. organization.

Proposition #1: The people who are affected most directly and who stand to lose the most become most active in planning and development issues.

In Chinatown, the people who became most active are those faced with immediate eviction. Of those faced with immediate eviction, the people who have no alternative because they cannot afford to pay higher rents, decide to stay inside Chinatown and join in the struggle to fight Urban Renewal.

Proposition #2: As people become conscious about how they are affected by development plans, the more involved they will become.

This has an implication for P.A.C.E. in terms of broadening their base of support. P.A.C.E. feels that they will have to get more research done and inform people of how they will be affected if they are to join in the organization and fight Urban Renewal. If people will wait until they are directly affected, then it will be too late. The more people evicted from Chinatown, the smaller the number of people to demand decent low-cost housing inside Chinatown.

Proposition #3: Going through proper channels is necessary but not sufficient to gain concessions from the City Government.

P.A.C.E. has found that they have to build a lot of public pressure to get a response from The City to meet their needs.

Proposition #4: City planners are more responsive to corporate interests such as those in the DIA, than they are to the needs of the poor and common people. This is also the case in other areas of Hawaii where residents are being evicted for profitable and speculative development. Very few development projects have been for low to moderate income families. Today, 80% of Hawaii's people are priced out of the housing market.

Proposition #5: Planning decisions on development involve basic decisions about the democratic rights of the majority of people, but these rights are often disregarded for reasons of expediency and to limit public opposition.

The people have the democratic right to have their views heard and represented in decision-making through public meetings. This process is often cut short.

The people have a right to adequate relocation if they are being evicted. In Chinatown, eviction notices were given and contracts put out to bid, but no systematic relocation plan that would adequately meet the needs of the people was developed. Planning for relocation is just as important as planning for redevelopment, but this is the aspect which is most often ignored until the residents organize and make a demand for this right.